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ABSTRACT

This article presents samples of imaginative programs that meld the fundamentals of the service learning methodology with individual learning and behavioral goals at the middle school level. The paper is divided into: (1) "What Do We Mean by Service Learning?"; (2) "The Fit between Service Learning and the Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents"; (3) "The Academic Benefits of Service Learning"; (4) "Exciting Examples of Service Learning in Action"; (5) "Essential Components of Quality Programs"; and (6) "Conclusion." A reference section offers additional resources for incorporating service learning into the classroom. (EH)

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A Bridge to Adulthood: Service Learning at the Middle Level.

by Alice L. Halsted

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Midpoints
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We learn by doing. — John Dewey

An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come.
— Victor Hugo, 1852

These two old and often-quoted maxims neatly encompass the dramatic rise of service learning in the last two decades. Service learning embodies Dewey's simple truth, and the positive reception it has been accorded seems to indicate that service learning will become a standard component of education in the 21st century.

The benefits of service learning and the developmental appropriateness of it for young adolescents make one wonder why it has been so long in coming to the forefront. Service learning is in line with what we know about learning and the nature of 10-15 year olds—but it requires flexibility in scheduling and it doesn't fit in content-dominated courses, so it had to bide its time.

However, when the middle school began to take hold and break the mold of traditional schooling by instituting teams, curriculum integration, and flexible block scheduling, service learning was quick to take advantage of the resulting climate. Freed from the constraints of a bell-dominated schedule and single subject instruction presented to passive learners many things were now possible—and progressive teachers made service learning programs prominent among newer reforms.

The educational climate has been supportive of change in recent years, and now the political climate has become a surprising encourager of new ways of conducting the educational enterprise. President Bush touted the concept of volunteer service during his term, and President Clinton has made the improvement of schools his number one priority. The future of service learning is bright.

John H. Lounsbury

A Bridge to Adulthood:
Service Learning at the Middle Level

Alice L. Halsted

Comment aurais-je pu concevoir, en comtemplant mes camarades, qu'ils éprouvaient un désarroi similaire? J'étais trop prisonnier de mon égotisme pour pouvoir lire derrière leurs visages acnéens et inacheveés, qu'ils connaissent peut-être le même malaise, le même espoir contredit par la même poussé de cafard .... Étaient-ils tous, autant que moi, embarrassés de leur chair, anxieux de jouer un rôle et sortir de cet état transitoire: arrachés à l'enfance mais pas encore des hommes, honteux de leurs corps, juvénile et sans pouvoir?

How could I have conceived, in thinking about my friends, that they were experiencing a similar kind of confusion? I was too much a prisoner of my egotism to be able to read, behind their acned and unfinished faces, that they could know the same melancholy, the same hopes contradicted by the same sense of gloom.....Were all of them, as was I, embarrassed by their bodies, anxious to play a role [in the world] and shed the bonds of this transitory state: breaking with childhood but not yet men, ashamed of their bodies, juvenile and powerless?

—translated from the French

In his poignant memoir *Quinze Ans* (1992), French writer Philippe Labro describes the jumble of intense emotions that characterized his adolescence. In one day or even one hour, his mood rose and fell, the victim of a casual remark by a friend or a criticism made by a teacher. Above everything else, Labro recalls his sense of isolation, sometimes real, always imagined, which because of his self-absorption made it impossible for him to recognize that his peers were experiencing the same things.

The adolescent years are filled with promise and possibility. They

From the opportunity afforded to learn through experience to the chance to test oneself in different settings, service learning offers multiple ways for teachers to engage young people in learning and to help move them toward successful and responsible adulthood.

- Youth acquire skills, among them critical thinking, problem-solving and planning. Whether treating a wounded animal in the A.R.K. project in Indiana or caring for young children with Down's Syndrome by adolescents from Clarke Middle School in Westbury, New York, young people's self-images improve not because of imagined good feelings but rather as a result of increased competence.
- Service learning provides obvious and valuable opportunities to enrich in-school learning with hands-on activities beyond the school walls. Service can provide the meat for experiential education, cooperative learning and civics education, helping to show young people that school and the real world are indeed connected.
- Service learning is preparation for employment. Young people learn first-hand about the varied roles of workers and gain an understanding of employers' expectations and appropriate workplace behavior.
- Service offers an opportunity to prepare young people for citizenship. Ernest Boyer wrote, "To further our tradition of government by the people and to preserve our nation's well-being, education for citizenship is not an option — it's what schools are for." (1990)
- To foster caring, compassionate behavior is the most compelling reason to encourage service in the close of the twentieth century. Adolescents have impressive skills, capacities, and talents that communities need and have an obligation to foster. They are tender and empathetic but rarely have the chance to show off their good will. Service can broaden the scope of young peoples' lives by linking them to a wide range of caring adults who offer positive examples of adult behavior and who care about their lives.

are a time when choices are made, consciously or unconsciously, that will affect one's entire future. One feels things intensely; life can be made bearable or unbearable by the glance of a treasured person. The young person finds him or herself "in-between" — too old to be treated as a child but not yet ready to face the world as an adult. But however turbulent, adolescence is a time rife with opportunity.

It was only in reflecting, from some distance, on his past, that Labro could understand why he behaved as he did and what the consequences of his actions were. Much in the same way, but more immediately, service learning that has claimed a major place on today's educational agenda helps young people to learn from experiences and to ponder their meaning through a process of structured reflection.

At its most fundamental level, service learning promotes thinking ahead, preparing for situations, and just as valuably, learning from past actions, in order to ***deepen understanding*** and ***improve*** performance in the future. Service learning is about thinking — complex thinking about complicated issues — which results in heightened awareness, skill-acquisition and an awakening of maturity in young adolescents.

The beauty of service learning lies in its ability to advance many different teaching agendas from workforce preparation to curriculum integration to community involvement while simultaneously enabling young people to develop self-confidence and experience the unique pleasure of giving.

Service learning should be a central element of the middle school curriculum, not only because of its obvious parallels to the philosophy behind the middle school, but also because its instructional strategy meshes with young adolescents' needs and capabilities. Involvement in service learning can advance the goals that educators have for students, from developing awareness of the workplace to mastering specific curricula. It also addresses the compelling need to connect youth with caring adults outside of school and family who can serve as mentors, reinforcing positive messages conveyed by teachers and family members.

Talented middle level educators around the country are employing service learning to fulfill a host of varied educational goals. They have used their imaginations to weave service into course materials, develop meaningful links between students and interested community members and reinforce classroom learning by experience. Through this article, readers will be introduced to a sampling of imaginative but at the same time doable programs that meld the fundamentals of the service learning methodology with individual learning and behavioral goals.

I. What Do We Mean by Service Learning?

At the National Helpers Network, we hear examples every day of exciting projects that link young people to their communities. However laudable, many of these projects cannot be classified as service learning. For example, seventh grade students in an art class reach out to residents of a local nursing home by sending them colorful, handmade greeting cards during the holiday season. Or a social studies class studies the effects of homelessness with a visit to a shelter to interview its residents serving as a culminating event. These are wonderful gestures but they fall short of service learning.

Service learning as defined by the Alliance for Service Learning in Education Reform (1993) is a method by which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs. Service experiences are best when they are integrated with school curricula and afford students an opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their experiences and connect them in meaningful ways to their own lives.

To put this in concrete terms, service learning requires *on-going* involvement of students, for a minimum of six weeks, in *legitimate* work for which they *prepare* and upon which they *reflect* regularly. The service is inextricably linked to the learning, and repeated contacts with the same adults over an extended period allow inter-generational friendships to develop and grow.

Just as importantly, community needs are not subordinated to the needs of students. Understandably, educators are often so preoccupied with the experiences and reactions of their students involved in service that they lose sight of the needs of the agencies in which students are placed. Service learning can "reinvent community," as Gardner put it, but only if there is a compelling reason for a school/community collaboration. Many of the most successful programs spring from a need on the part of a community agency that willing, extra hands can fill.

Service experiences are best when they are integrated with school curricula and afford students an opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their experiences and connect them in meaningful ways to their own lives.

For example, at the Center for Families and Children in a struggling section of Queens, New York, Renée Holley, at that time the Program Director at the Center, was trying to cope with a large influx of elementary school children in her after-school program. She turned first to a local college for help, asking undergraduate students in education to fill supervisory roles in a homework help program for the 40 or so third graders who came to the Center each afternoon. Although the college students were willing to help, they were frequently unable to perform their assigned tasks because of the press of papers due, exams, and their class schedules.

Out of need, Renée contacted the only other resource in her neighborhood, the local junior high school. She remembered how effective her own son had been as a baby sitter in his early adolescence, and reasoned that the natural affinity of adolescents for younger children would make them excellent candidates to help third graders with their homework and assist them in many other ways as well. What emerged is the flourishing Adolescent Teacher Squad (so named by its first participants), a group of dedicated young adolescents who work faithfully at the Center each week, serving as tutors and recreation leaders for small groups of youngsters.

II. The Fit Between Service Learning and the Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents

I realize that one might be intimidated by the above-stated requirements for quality service learning and wonder why anyone would want to embark on such a demanding undertaking. There are enough other things going on during the course of a school semester. One of the most persuasive reasons to persevere is the striking parallel between what young adolescents need and what service learning offers.

Mitchell in the *Nature of*

Service learning is a method by which young people learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully-organized service experiences...

- That meet actual community needs.
- That are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community.
- That are integrated into each young person's academic curriculum.
- That provide structured time for a young person to think, talk, and write about what he/she did and saw during the actual service activity.
- That provide young people with opportunities to use newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities.
- That enhance what is taught in the school by extending student learning beyond the classroom.
- That help to foster the development of a sense of caring for others.

Adolescence (1991) tells us that the central work of adolescents is to answer the question, "Who am I?" Thoughtfully planned service learning can add to youngsters' self-knowledge and accomplishments precisely at the tender age at which they are trying to determine who they are, what values they will adopt and what they can offer the world. Service learning enhances classroom activities with opportunities to develop a sense of competence, so that young people can test themselves in new settings and discover new skills.

Recently I accompanied a colleague to an ESL Peer Tutoring Program where teens whose first language is Spanish tutor those who are taking Spanish as a foreign language. We listened to 12 and 13 year olds reflect back over the year and devise a process to evaluate their effectiveness as tutors. The tone of the meeting resembled that of meetings with adults I have attended over many years. The program leader participated at the meeting as a colleague and equal rather than leader and skillfully wove tutors' suggestions into an improvement plan for the upcoming year.

The program leader had hoped that through participation in this group, students who felt only embarrassment about their proficiency in Spanish would see it in a more positive light, as would their peers. She used weekly reflection sessions not only to help tutors plan their lessons, but also to monitor students' attitudes toward themselves and their accomplishments. After a stimulating session in which many useful suggestions for improvement in the program emerged, my colleague remarked, "We really protect young people far too long, thinking that we are doing well by them, when in fact we are denying them the opportunities to practice the very behavior we later demand of them."

Many educators have written convincingly about the natural fit between the needs of adolescents and the goals of service learning but none more affectingly than Schine (1989) a true pioneer in the field who states,

> Adolescents who help to care for young children, who assist the handicapped, serve in soup kitchens, tutor their peers or younger children, visit with the aging, assist shut-ins, ... clean up a stream or advocate for the homeless, are filling the void that our age of technology and specialization has created in their lives; like their counterparts of an earlier era, they are assuming meaningful roles and responding to real needs of their society as well as to their own need to be needed. (p. 1)

This stage of life, whatever has come before, can be the gateway to bad choices. But Scales (1992) reminds us that for the vast majority of youth, adolescence is a promising time, filled with possibility. It is just this potential for the positive that service learning reinforces.

Why should we assume that because young people are experiencing significant biological and emotional changes, that they are unable to perform in an exemplary fashion? Arnold (1993) states that "in societies where the young are well integrated into the social fabric, clear roles exist, and there are established rites of passage into adulthood, adolescence in a behavioral sense scarcely exists" (p. 3).

I am reminded of a session I conducted on Students as Evaluators, a process created for the National Helpers Network by Dr. Patricia Campbell through which young people serve as program evaluators. They

develop an evaluation design, collect and tabulate data and develop recommendations for programs in which they have participated. I presented a workshop on Students as Evaluators to a mixed group of adults and young adolescents and was challenged by a self-described researcher who expressed skepticism that young adolescents could be objective in assessing a program in which they had a stake. Recognizing that I might not be considered altogether unbiased on this subject (given my announced enthusiasm for a process I have facilitated many times over the years, in which the fairness of student evaluators has been tested on numerous occasions with superb results) I turned to a young conference goer — *aged 11* — and posed the question to her. "Could she," I asked, "imagine herself in the situation of evaluator and put her personal opinions to the side in any study she conducted?" The maturity of her response surprised the audience. "Of course I could," she responded with an impatience that showed surprise that she should have been asked. "Kids can be very fair, if they know why they are being asked to do something." Of course. Although I am not sure if the questioner was mollified, I could heartily endorse the answer from my own experience. If the ground rules are carefully laid out and rationalized, and if roles and responsibilities are clear, young people can be trusted to perform in a mature way that belies their years.

Lest one assume that the road is consistently smooth, I must disabuse the reader. No path to learning is straight. But another benefit of service learning is that the twists and turns along the way offer their own rewards. Some of the most substantive reflection seminars I have attended, have treated difficult ethical issues that would challenge any adult.

For example, I attended a reflection session that came on the heels of a very disappointing visit to a local nursing home. Students involved in this intergenerational program had been promised that they would be involved in helping seniors train for the special Olympics. They arrived at the residence with high expectations only to be told to fan out in pairs throughout the complex and fetch residents for, to the horror of the students, a concert by — the horror only increased — a string quartet! As luck would have it, any chance of this becoming an unexpectedly pleasant experience was mitigated by the fact that the elevators of the institution were not working properly which caused some students to be stranded on the upper floors, forced to amuse their wheelchair bound buddies for up to 45 minutes before the elevator arrived. They then joined the concert in progress for which they were unprepared and unappreciative.

When I arrived at the session, the students were in high dudgeon. They felt that they had been taken advantage of and wanted revenge. This sense of outrage fueled a very rich reflection session. We reviewed the facts, with help from the Program Leader who was able to separate truth from rumor, an excellent reality check in itself. We then discussed options for action. The students wanted to descend, en masse and unannounced, to the office of the director to "straighten her out." We discussed the pros and cons of this approach and performed a role play in which a courageous young person acted as the nursing home director. It became very heated.

But a wonderful thing happened. The students had been so sure of their position that they had been unable to see another side of the issue until they heard it first hand from the "director." That there *was* another side startled many of them. Ultimately, the group decided on a more conciliatory strategy without abandoning the hope of voicing their dissatisfaction. They appointed their program leader as spokesperson and worked on an outline of points that they entrusted her to make at a meeting another student called to arrange with the administration of the facility. What had begun as a free-for-all turned into an extraordinary exercise in problem solving. (The meeting did take place and as the Program Leader and the students were not satisfied with the results, the school decided not to perform service at that site the following semester.)

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Examples of written reflection attest to the power it can have to shape behavior and thinking. Students from the Duke Middle School in Durham, NC regularly reflect in journals about their experiences with seniors. Take note of the complex ideas represented here, the attempts by youngsters to examine difficult issues only to learn that there are no easy answers. Also note the rich opportunities for teachers to interact with their students and explore their common concerns.

> I had a great day today. I met someone named Wilbert. He told us about his gambling, drinking, high school job, and other neat things. It was cool because when we first came in he wanted to see Jessy. After that, he talked to me and played bingo, that was really cool because it got a bit of people together...My visits have really not changed how I feel about aging. It does make me want to enjoy life though, because I saw some young old people there...As I really think about it, it [aging] scares me. I guess maybe growing up so fast really is *not* so great. It has also made me relize (sic) how lucky I am. To be able to have full control over my body. This is one of my biggest fears, that I'll go blind or lose a leg, or get terribly sick etc.

To this, the teacher responded:

> It takes a mature person to admit his fears. In our hearts, we all are scared — at some level — that we'll lose full control of our bodies. Helping others in that situation, as you've done, is an important step in facing that fear and perhaps conquering it. You can see that life doesn't end with a loss — and that human contact and love still bring joy, no matter what the impairment.

This shifting of roles that enables young people and adults to interact collegially, in contrast to the typical classroom situation in which the teacher always plays the role of master of knowledge, can have a liberating effect on both teacher and student. New paths to understanding emerge through which both are enriched.

III. The Academic Benefits of Service Learning

Service learning is a valuable strategy for academic learning as well as affective development; the process can be shaped to fulfill multiple goals. It simply requires a willingness to identify areas of the curriculum in which students would benefit from applied learning in concrete settings. Here is one example of how the methodology of service learning can be tailored to suit instructional as well as behavioral goals.

Let us say that a planning team decides that there are rich opportunities to be derived from linking eighth graders with seniors at a nearby senior center. For many, this is the extent of the service learning planning process, and the rest of the planning being devoted to the logistics of bringing the two groups together, such as scheduling and transportation. But to get the most out of these encounters, it is crucial to determine the purpose of the interactions. In other words, what does the teacher want the students to *learn* from their service? And just as importantly, how will the clients of the senior center benefit? For agencies to welcome young adolescents into their midst, their administrators must also see benefits in the collaboration. Here are some suggestions:

Making Healthy Life Choices/Health. Both seniors and young adolescents are experiencing significant physical changes. The two groups can study ailments that afflict the elderly and how these problems are related to poor choices in health habits related to diet, exercise, and substance abuse earlier in their lives.

Society's Responsibility to the Elderly/Social Studies. Students and seniors might examine reasons for homelessness or poverty. Lessons could be devised to examine social issues such as the safety net for the elderly and the Social Security and Medicare systems. Seniors might help youth reflect on the changes that have been wrought over the past 50 years in the area of social services.

An Introduction to the World of Work/Home & Careers. Through service, young people might be introduced to the varied health professions that are involved in treating the elderly which include medicine as well as social work.

Encouraging Mutual Respect Among Groups/Language Arts. As neighborhoods change, communities often fragment. Sharing information about differing cultures can result in the dispelling of false stereotypes, thus forging new bonds between cultures and generations.

Preparing Youth for the Responsibilities of Citizenship/ Social Studies. Seniors and youth can collaborate on addressing a shared concern, learning together how to address a community problem can bring about change for the common good. Not only will youth acquire basic skills, they will also be exposed to the levels of government of which they must be aware in order to take their place in society when they are older.

In establishing these overarching ideas for service, preparation is simplified, subjects for reflection sessions emerge and results become clearer to measure.

IV. Exciting Examples of Service Learning in Action

Illustrations of service learning are as varied as the educators and students who participate. The best applications of service learning are those that fill real community needs while consciously addressing the learning and behavioral goals established by teachers and students together, and that are linked to core academic areas so that classroom learning is reinforced.

When social studies teacher Mike Papritz introduced his students at the Cedar Heights Junior High School, Kent, Washington to the phenomenon of ghost towns, he was building on his knowledge and interest in the abandoned mining towns of the Northwest that he had studied for a Master's thesis. Just such an intriguing example was the town of Franklin, located south of Seattle on state park land. Mr. Papritz's students formed committees to explore a variety of subjects connected with Franklin specifically and the mining industry generally. They have mapped the site, performed an archeological dig, created oral histories from interviews with former residents, determined the output of the mine at its peak by calculating the depth of various mine shafts, and examined the health risks of mining and the type of health care available to miners at the turn of the century. The students' dedication to the town has resulted in Franklin being placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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There are several things worth noting about this imaginative example of service learning. First, the work grew out of one man's passion for the subject. But despite his enthusiasm, Papritz assumed the role of facilitator rather than expert. That meant that he was willing to allow his students to take the project where it might lead them, instead of establishing a firm curriculum. The interdisciplinary character of the project developed naturally rather than being imposed by a pedagogical requirement that links be found among subject areas.

Most importantly, the students learned a vivid lesson about the devastating impact of thoughtless actions. Not every teenager in the community was connected to the ghost town project. In fact some of them saw the abandoned town as a perfect place to vandalize. On one visit to the site, Papritz's students saw their efforts to restore the town's cemetery destroyed. Papritz said, "This is the first time that many of my students have had to cope with being a victim of vandalism. Some of them might have actually been involved in vandalizing property themselves, or have thought vandalism was no big deal. Now that it is happening to them, they are angry about it." No doubt, this was a hard-learned lesson that would not soon be forgotten.

A critical element of the River Restoration Project in Westport, Massachusetts, another successful program, is its clearly stated goals, which are (1) to provide rigorous math and science learning experiences to students, and (2) to expose students to various careers associated with the water. Westport is a farming/fishing community located on Rhode Island Sound near New Bedford. The project is an offshoot of a local coalition of environmental groups, fishermen, scientists, and students from Westport Community Schools to research the reasons behind a precipitous decline in the

spawning of bay scallops in the region. The obvious environmental and economic impact on the community was the impetus for starting the project — a clear example of service learning springing from community needs.

Seventh and eighth grade students have assumed an active role "at the water" with classroom preparation on topics such as river-bed geology, marine biology, ecology, and water chemistry. The work has become so accepted that it is now a permanent part of the curriculum, extending into the high school. Not incidentally, this active learning has been instrumental in increasing dramatically the bay scallop harvest from only 400 bushels in 1993 to 40,000 bushels in 1996.

The Duke School for Children Middle School in Durham, North Carolina (mentioned earlier) stresses interpersonal skills in the two classes of seventh graders who serve as tutors in an elementary school and as visitors to a nursing home. Major insights have been gained such as the recognition that conversation is a learned skill and needs to be practiced, which students do at a local nursing home. The young adolescent tutors have related their own "teaching skills" to those of their teachers and in reflection have discussed the role of a good teacher and the qualities needed to fulfill that role. Reflection time for the tutors is a highlight of the program as they eagerly share their experiences. Some students who had never before shown an interest in leadership or responsibility have found footing in this project and have transferred their new-found self-confidence back to the classroom.

Some students who had never before shown an interest in leadership or responsibility have found footing in this project and have transferred their new-found self-confidence back to the classroom.

Teachers and administrators at A. MacArthur Barr Middle School in Nanuet, New York were eager to implement service learning but were faced with, as is often the case, scheduling hurdles. In order to assure that all eighth graders experience the benefits of service, Principal Peter Bydlik linked service to the district-mandated Home and Careers requirement. Rather than spacing service experiences once a week for the course of a semester, MacArthur Barr students have an intense introduction to the community by performing service *every day* over the course of ten weeks at one of thirteen sites in the area, accompanied by weekly reflection.

In this intensive example of daily service, students work at day care centers, nursery schools, elementary schools, nursing homes, and a school for physically and mentally disabled children. In the day care centers and nursery schools, students help with general supervision of the younger children, help in art activities, read to the children and supervise hygienic care (washing hands, brushing teeth, etc.). In the elementary schools, students assist the teachers with whole class activities, and perform one-on-one tutoring. Those students who work in the nursing home help with transport, serve lunch, play games, sketch the seniors, and engage them in conversation. Students who work at the Jesse Kaplan School for children with physical and mental disabilities assist with exercises, eating, puppet shows, academic work, and socialization. The intense, daily exposure has produced profound reflections among students while simultaneously enlivening the Home and Careers curriculum that might otherwise be artificial.

The Intergenerational Service Learning Unit at Nespelem School in central Washington, at first look, resembles other intergenerational programs in which sixth grade students serve the residents of a convalescent center. What sets it apart is that the students not only gain experience interacting with elders, but also study the aging process. While studying nutrition, physical and mental health, and drug and alcohol prevention, students set goals for their own lives and apply what they have learned to their understanding of their friends at the convalescent center.

What makes this program even more remarkable is that all of the students are Native American, live on a reservation, and come from homes that have a high rate of unemployment, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol problems.

The program strives to help stu-

dents understand the aging process and make thoughtful, positive choices about their own physical and mental health. During the year they focus on five core values: family, trust, caring, respect, and responsibility. By reflecting on their lives and those of the elders, students begin to see the effects of the choices one makes on one's life. Throughout the program there is a strong emphasis on understanding and dealing with emotions. As an interdisciplinary unit, service learning combines science, social studies, humanities, the arts, health, study skills, and language arts.

As can be seen by these few examples, the breadth of service learning around the country is only limited by the imagination of educators.

V. Essential Components of Quality Programs

It is apparent from the examples described that service learning can take many forms in order to accomplish the objectives that educators, students, and community members establish. Some programs meet during the school day, some after school. Programs may serve different segments of the local community or be linked to different curricular areas. But in order for service learning to flourish and last, there are certain common elements that must be in place. The following describes the critical components of a quality program.

An Overarching Idea. Clear reasons for undertaking the service learning process must be set and understood by everyone, combined with clear expectations for service and learning outcomes. If there is a first among equals in the critical components, this is it. Too often, students are sent out into the community because of an inchoate desire among adults to address character issues or a lack of "community spirit" among students. With so little in the way of a foundation, the benefits that result are hit or miss. Planning a program with clearly articulated objectives, such as the education of young people about the caring professions or the reinforcement of their basic math skills through cross-age tutoring, provides the foundation for a progression of learning and is the basis for reflection.

A Skilled, Understanding Adult Facilitator. A program leader who is knowledgeable about youth, sensitive to their needs, and committed to helping them mature can make the most of the situations that arise during the course of service. Program leaders should be comfortable with uncertainty since at the outset of service the most important lessons to be learned are not always obvious. Flexibility and willingness to take advantage of learning opportunities whenever and wherever they occur enables the leader to exploit each teachable moment. (P.S. A sense of humor does not hurt!)

Sustained Involvement. For young people, time is a different dimension than it is for adults. Weeks or even days can seem like a lifetime. It takes time to understand the work site and forge friendships. An *ongoing, regularly-scheduled service experience lasting a minimum of six weeks*, one visit per week, rather than an occasional or sporadic site visit, affords the best opportunity for learning.

Meaningful Service Assignments. No one can smoke out "make work" faster than an adolescent. Work assignments are required that give young people real responsibilities and fill a true need are essential as is proper supervision. Concomitantly, community agencies have needs as well. Both partners must agree on service assignments that fulfill the needs and desires of each.

Collaboration and Communication. All participants — young people, administrators, teachers, site personnel, parents, and those being served — should be involved in planning and executing the program. There should be a clear understanding among the students, the service program sponsor, and the service site about the responsibilities of each.

Training and Ongoing Reflection. Service learning should provide a

The opportunity to interact with the same adults each week gives youth a broader range of role models and helps reconnect them to their community.

guided experience for young people that gives them the skills, knowledge, and understanding they need to meet their responsibilities. Preparation and training for site work is essential for the satisfactory performance of their duties at the site. With regular and structured opportunities to reflect on their experiences, young people are afforded the chance to look back on site experiences and learn from them in order to improve performance.

Program Evaluation. Answers to even the most informal question such as, "How is it going?" will yield essential information during the course of a program that can help to strengthen ongoing work and sustain service learning in the future. With clear learning and behavioral goals established at the outset, concrete outcomes can be agreed to during the course of the service and at its conclusion. When considering how to collect information for evaluating a program, one should not overlook the role that students can play. With the proper preparation, they can be very effective in gathering and synthesizing information on the effectiveness of a program in which they have participated.

Exposure to the Same Adults. An additional element of importance in the service learning experience is the opportunity for young people to connect with caring adults who recognize their talents and their promise. Service learning experiences can be divided between those that are interpersonal and those that are not. In requiring young people to fill roles in which they encounter the same adults regularly, friendship and understanding can flourish, thus filling the adolescent's need to develop bonds within the community outside of family and school. Even in those programs in which a personal connection to other people is not a predominant element, such as in environmental work, thought might be given to allowing youngsters repeated exposures to the same adults during the period of service work. The opportunity to interact with the same adults each week gives youth a broader range of role models and helps reconnect them to their community.

Recognition. Students' efforts should be recognized in informal and formal ways over the course of the service experience. Recognizing the work that children and youth perform, often in a culminating event or celebration, reinforces the significance of the enterprise and the worth of the young people. Also, thought should be given to preparing youngsters to say goodbye to those they have come to count on at the service site. Some ritual, however informal, enables participants to acknowledge the difficulty of separation.

Just as it takes time to forge relationships at the service site, it takes time to establish effective, sustained service learning. Simply gathering all the different players together to agree on program goals and develop careful plans can take months to complete. But time spent at the beginning of the process yields enormous benefits in the implementation. If there were just one piece of advice I could pass along to those new to service learning it would be: Take your time. Go slowly, plan carefully, and then enjoy the results.

VI. Conclusion

A group of young teens gathered on a summer afternoon to reflect on their work of ten weeks together. Fifteen young adolescents who had settled in New York City from around the globe had studied their new neighborhood together and addressed a community need. When asked if the work meant anything to him, a sober 13-year-old young man said, "Service learning gave me hope." In elaborating, he alluded to the sense of insecurity and longing that is so common among this age group, as his peers nodded in agreement. He had been separated from everything that was familiar to him and brought to what he felt were alien surroundings just at the point in his life when he, like so many others of his age, feel the most isolated and invisible. In his adopted country, the young man had experienced frustration in school because the methods of learning, indeed the very organization of the day, were so new to him. Thrust into his service group, he began to discover that he had talents that the group needed. He was a natural leader who could motivate the group to overcome obstacles that are unavoidable in any effort to make change in a community. He also learned some concrete skills such as writing a business letter and conducting a search of periodicals at the local library. Exposed to a situation in which he was encouraged to learn and reflect on the learning, he sur-

prised himself with his abilities.

I have thought a lot about that young man since. I have asked myself how someone can be expected to learn if hope is absent. Especially in the most impoverished communities, the absence of hope ensures the absence of progress. Introducing young people to the power of service learning can, at its best, restore a sense of hope for the future and imbue in young people a sense of their potential. It can give a point to classroom learning for those who find schooling irrelevant, at best. It can revive a sense of caring among youngsters who behave in self-destructive ways.

As with the young man described by Philippe Labro, the passage from childhood to adulthood can be painful at times, but it can also present immense opportunities for learning and for planting in young people a hope in the future and a sense of their place in it. Service learning is a means of making the most of this exciting time in the lives of our young people. When implemented with care and clear goals, service learning offers limitless opportunities to youth — all youth — to find an important place for themselves in the world.

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Alice L. Halsted is President, National Helpers' Network (NHN). This organization has been particularly active in developing and supporting service learning programs. Persons interested in securing further information about NHN can call 1-800-646-4623.

NMSA also has two published resources on service learning. One is the themed issue of *Middle School Journal*, November, 1996, and the other is the book *Service Learning in Middle Schools: Building a Culture of Service* by Fertman, White, & White, 1996.

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